



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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In an attempt to give the Pacific Coast its share of the prized diamond back terrapin which up to now has been the east coast's exclusive possession, a number of terrapin--adults as well as youngsters--were released on the California coast this year.

The terrapin came from the Fish and Wildlife Service's hatchery at Beaufort, North Carolina and were shipped across the country to the California Division of Fish and Game, which supervised the release of the stock. The 1943 plantings marked the first effort to naturalize the diamond back terrapin on the West coast.

Terrapin, chief ingredient of the celebrated stew which may coast as much as \$3.50 a plate at such restaurants as are able to include it on their menus, once was quite common in the South Atlantic states but the great demand resulted in the rapid diminution of the number existing in the wild state.

Since it was established in 1909, the Fish and Wildlife Service's Beaufort Station--largest terrapin hatchery in the world--has produced nearly 200,000 diamond backs for restocking areas where the species has been reduced or has disappeared, according to a report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

Terrapin, like their cousins the turtles, live to a ripe old age. They do not become mature until they are 5 or 6 years old and in the past many immature terrapin have been captured before they reached breeding age.

Experiments conducted under the direction of Dr. H.F. Prytherch at the Beaufort hatchery have resulted in a considerably increased productivity on the part of the breeding stock. Now the hatchery is producing from 10,000 to nearly 17,000 young terrapin a year. The breeding stock consists of about 2,000 females and 600 males.

The young terrapin remain at Beaufort for 11 months after hatching and are then released, usually with the cooperation of State Game and Fish Departments. A year-old terrapin is large enough to protect itself from many enemies such as rats, minks, and sea gulls which can successfully attack baby terrapin.

Contrary to experience with some other animals, the diamond back breeds better in captivity than in the wild state. It takes about five years of captivity for a wild adult female to produce as many eggs as a female which has always been in

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captivity. Nevertheless, wild terrapin are constantly being added to the breeding stock at Beaufort, to keep the stock strong.

Terrapin continue to breed for a long period. The oldest female at the laboratory-estimated to be over 50--produces as many eggs as females less than a third that age. Males are considerably smaller than females.

Terrapin seem to travel well and there are normally few casualties when they are shipped to various states for distribution. The boxes in which they are shipped are exactly like those used to ship baby chicks.

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